

DE SOTO'S CAPAHA: SIOUAN OR TUNICAN?¹

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This paper concerns what many believe to be the first documented reference anywhere to a Siouan tribe.

In the year 1539 Hernando de Soto landed in Florida and marched across what are now the southeastern United States. He is credited with discovering the Mississippi River, and his body was ultimately entombed in its waters. Three of the participants on the de Soto expedition (two Spanish speakers and one Portuguese speaker) kept journals documenting, among other things, the names of the native towns they passed through. These town names have enabled linguists, working with anthropologists and archaeologists, to draw a moderately accurate ethnographic map of the proto-historic Southeast--a map that had already changed considerably by the time the French and English turned their attention to the region 130 years later. Thus linguistic identification of the de Soto town names represents an important contribution to our understanding of these early times.

Upon crossing the Mississippi River into present-day Arkansas, de Soto's party lived for about a month in an Indian town called *Pacaha* or *Capaha* by Spanish chroniclers. Because of the superficial similarity of one of the spellings of this town name to the name of one of the Quapaw villages at the mouth of the Arkansas River visited by Marquette in 1673, many linguists and historians over the years have equated *Pacaha* with the Quapaws. W. David Baird in his 1980 history of the Quapaw tribe attributes the first mention of this theory to Father Charlevoix in 1721, and it has been endlessly repeated since then in both professional and popular literature. The following are a few typical examples.

"The Kwapa or Quapaw tribe of Indians are identical with the Pacaha or Capaha who were met by De Soto when he discovered the Mississippi River." (Dorsey 1895:130)

"The descriptive name *Omaha* (*umoⁿ'hoⁿ*, 'against the current' or 'upstream') had been fixed on the people prior to 1541. In that year De Soto's party met the Quapaw tribe; *quapaw*, or *uga'xpa*, means 'with the current' or 'down-

stream,' and is the complement of *umoⁿ·hoⁿ*, or *Omaha*." (Fletcher and La Flesche 1972:36)

"The chronicles of De Soto's expedition in 1541 report the Quapaw as the 'Pacaha' or 'Capaha,' located on the west bank of the Mississippi River about forty or fifty miles north of the mouth of the Arkansas River." (Wright 1951:219)

"If the Quapaw were the same as the Capaha encountered by De Soto in 1541, they apparently had moved down the Mississippi during the intervening century and a half." (Crawford 1975:56)

There are many other such references--well into the 1980's-- especially in the archaeological literature (for several references v. Jeter 1986:41), so it is important to clarify if possible the widely held view that Pacaha was the town of Kappa (Quapaw) later visited by the French.

Let me anticipate my conclusion here and state that, though I am of course a Siouanist with a special interest in Quapaw, I am forced by the evidence to conclude that Pacaha was not Quapaw and not Siouan in linguistic affiliation. The evidence, as in all of these place name studies, is slim but qualitatively important and, I believe, now conclusive.

Some of the existing evidence was pointed out by John R. Swanton of the BAE and others over the years scattered through various publications. I want to bring it all together here and then add a bit to it. In his early treatise on the Indian tribes of the lower Mississippi Valley, Swanton (1911:186) equated Pacaha and Quapaw, but his more detailed investigation for the 1939 de Soto Commission report to Congress, celebrating the 400th anniversary of the expedition, apparently convinced him that he had been wrong.

There are actually four written accounts of the expedition that mention this village. Three of them, those of Ranjel, Elvas and Biedma, are first hand accounts; the fourth, that of Garcilaso de la Vega el Inca, was composed from interviews and second hand accounts several years after the expedition and is acknowledged by historians to be the least faithful to the facts. There is also a map sometimes attributed to the expedition (reproduced in Swanton 1985:343, discussion p. 11).

All three first hand accounts agree on the spelling *Pacaha* (Swanton 1985:57), and the Spaniards lived in the village for close to a month, so there is no reason to assume that they experienced any confusion about its name. Yet if we look at the name by which the Quapaws call themselves, *okáxpá*, which is supposed to be what the chroniclers were attempting to reproduce, we can see that only by ignoring the three reliable accounts and comparing *okáxpá* to Garcilaso's spelling of the village name, *Capaha*, can we hope to see any real similarity.

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| First hand accounts: | p a c a h a |
| Garcilaso's account: | c a p a h a |
| In the Quapaw language: | o k á x p a |
| Early French accounts: | k a p p a |

Neither 16th century Spanish nor Middle French had any way to render Quapaw [x] in their spelling systems, so if Garcilaso's spelling were accurate, he would have been as close to the actual pronunciation of the Indian name as, say, Marquette or LaSalle's *Kappa* over a century later, which we know did represent the Quapaws. But we have seen that the other three chroniclers, all of whom stayed in the village a month, agree on the spelling *Pacaha*, which bears very little resemblance to *okáxpá*. So the evidence in favor of the meaning Quapaw for the name was never strong, and without the demonstrably less reliable Garcilaso, the equation of *Pacaha* with *Okaxpa* probably would never even have been proposed.

Nor is it possible to assume that the Indians themselves transposed the syllables in their tribal name between the time of the de Soto expedition and the arrival of the French, because the Kansa, Osage, Omaha, Ponca, and other related Siouan tribes share the Quapaw's designation, *okáxpá*. So the term in its present form is almost surely older than the split of these Siouan tribes, an event which took place well back into prehistoric times.

There is more evidence that bears on the ethnic identity of *Pacaha*. At *Pacaha* the Spaniards met, and in fact were offered as gifts, two sisters of the chief. (In Garcilaso's account these women are described as "wives".) The women's names are given by Biedma, written *Mochila* and *Macanoche*. And Swanton (1985:61) pointed out that one of these, *Macanoche*, is very close to *Tunica* for 'beloved-woman'.² *Tunica* is a language isolate spoken after the 16th century only much farther south along the Mississippi. Haas's 1953 (234, 242) *Tunica Dictionary* confirms the identity of

the constituent morphemes.

Biedma: m a c a n o c h e

Haas: m á h k a + n ú h ċ i ³

Spanish spelling conventions had no way to render syllable final *-h*, so those are missing, as they are everywhere in all the accounts, but otherwise the fit is as good as we find between Indian names and the Spanish vowel and consonant inventories anywhere in the Southeast. The full Haas entries are:

máhka adj. high in price, expensive, dear
-máhka st. G-S to love. (p. 234)

núhċi f. female, woman. (p. 242)

Two of the principles we must follow in trying to etymologize proper names of this sort are that, if a name does not conform to the known *grammatical patterns* of the language it is alleged to be from, or if it fails to conform to known *naming practices* in a given culture or culture area, then we must generally resist the temptation to believe that we have successfully explained it or established a secure etymology for it.

In Tunica it is not possible to treat this construction as a noun-adjective compound, since adjectives invariably follow the noun they modify (Haas 1940:75ff.). There are, however, deverbal nouns in Tunica, and *máhka* can be analyzed as a nominalized stative verb, 'one who is beloved' (v. Haas 1940:78). *Núhċi*, then, may be interpreted either as an adjective, 'female', or as another noun 'woman'. So the Tunica analysis of this name appears to pass the grammaticality test required of a successful place name etymology.

Regarding the meaning of *Macanоче*, although I am still researching the question, there is evidence that this name, a compound of 'beloved' and 'female', was an attested woman's name or (perhaps equally likely) a woman's title in other, contemporary southeastern cultures. Swanton (1985:61) mentions the existence of a nearly identical name in Natchez, and there is additional evidence from the Apalachee language, where the compound *beloved-woman* actually meant 'wife' (Kimball, personal communication). The words are different, of course, since Apalachee was a Muskogean language, but the meaning of the compound is the same, so the Tunica term is not at variance with known southeastern naming practices. And this name is the best linguistic evi-

dence we have for the actual ethnic identity of inhabitants of Pacaha. If Swanton's identification of the woman's name was correct, and I tend strongly to believe that it was, then Pacaha must have been a Tunican-speaking town.

Here it should also be pointed out that, whatever the exact meaning of these names, the real Quapaw language lacked any sound approaching [č], yet the women's names *Mochila* and *Macanoche* both contain this sound. Alveopalatal affricates have developed only recently preceding front vowels in Kansa and Osage, two other closely related Dhegiha Siouan dialects, but there was little or no parallel Quapaw development. Quapaw [čh] developed in isolated instances via retroflexion as a variant pronunciation of aspirated /th/, but only preceding back rounded vowels. Both names show it before front vowels however. In addition, [l] is not a Quapaw sound either, so the name *Mochila* is doubly unlikely to be Quapaw.⁴

Furthermore, the one other word of the Pacaha language that has been preserved, the so-called "second province" of Pacaha, called *Caluç* or *Caluça* by the chronicler Elvas, also contains an l--once again, not a phoneme in Quapaw (as of our earliest sample of real Quapaw, the vocabulary recorded by Gen. George Izard, Territorial Governor of Arkansas in the mid 1820's).⁵ So phonologically speaking, what little we have of Pacaha vocabulary seriously violates Quapaw segmental and sequential restrictions. All of the sounds found in words *Pacaha*, *Mochila*, *Macanoche* and *Caluç(a)* are regular phonemes in Tunica however.

Thus far we have seen that the name *Pacaha* does not really resemble the Quapaw self-designation, that one of the Pacaha proper names mentioned in the accounts seems transparently Tunican and that several of the sounds present in the few Pacaha words recorded are not normal speech sounds in the Quapaw language but are normal in Tunica. There are one or two further points worth mentioning.

On the Marquette map of 1673-74 (Tucker 1974) the location of the Quapaw tribe is clearly labeled with the name provided by the expedition's Illinois Algonquian-speaking interpreter, *Akansea*, but on the same map, up the Arkansas River from the known Quapaw villages, sandwiched between the Tunica and Koroa villages, is an unidentified town named *Papikaha*. The French did not ascend the river however, so the name represents second hand knowledge at best. But if *Papi-*

kaha and de Soto's Pacaha are the same, then there is evidence that these people (*Pa(pi)kaha*) and the Quapaw (Akansea) were perceived as separate and distinct ethnic entities in (1673) Marquette's time.⁶ And geographically at least, *Papikaha* was associated with the non-Siouan Tunica and Koroa.

Papikaha appears on a couple of other (derivative) French maps, then disappears entirely from history. The only real point here is that the French recorded *Papikaha* and the Quapaw towns as quite distinct from one another. The identity of de Soto's *Pacaha* and the later, second hand, *Papikaha* cannot be proved of course, although we would have to admit that the similarity is great.

Order of town names on several early French maps
of the Arkansas River Valley

| "Jol(1)iet" map 1674 | Marquette map 1673-4 | "Randin" map 1674-81 |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Paniasa | Atotchasi | Paniassa |
| Aiahichi | Matora | |
| Tanik8a | Akoroa | Tanik8a |
| Papikaha | Papikaha | Apapikaa |
| Emamoueta | Emam8eta | Emamoueta |
| Akoroua | Tanik8a | Akoroua |
| Matora | Paniassa | Matora |
| | Aiaichi | |
| Akansea | Akansea | Akansea |

Although the order of the names is reversed on one map, *Papikaha* is sandwiched between the Tunica and Koroa towns in both listings. Recall that all these lists represent second hand knowledge and probably come from a single source. Later French maps (LaSalle, Franquelin, etc.) show Tunica and Koroa towns only much further down the Mississippi Valley. The earliest maps do show a Tunican presence on the Arkansas River however, and it is not surprising to find *Papikaha* up-river among these towns.

This concludes my contribution on the linguistic identity of Pacaha. In summary, I feel that, even using more conservative standards than Swanton, I can reiterate and strengthen his conclusion, originally published in 1939, that Pacaha might be Tunican, and was in any event, certainly not Siouan-speaking.

Where the Quapaws were in 1541, we do not know, but as things stand now, it does not appear that de

Soto encountered any Siouan-speaking tribes during his exploration of the Southeast, and we must look elsewhere for the earliest reference to the Siouan peoples.

NOTES

(1) Most of this paper is derived from a more extensive treatment of de Soto place names by the author to be published as "Language Affiliations of Some de Soto Place Names in Arkansas" in a volume of proceedings from two conferences on *De Soto in Arkansas*, Michael Hoffman and Gloria Young, eds., to appear from the University of Arkansas Press.

(2) Swanton (1985:61) also mentions that "Makanadzi is said to have been an ancient name in (Natchez)." So both Tunica and Natchezan cultures may have had variant pronunciations of the name. The Natchez term cited by Swanton presumably does not break down into 'beloved one' and 'woman, female' in the Natchez language however. It is, in any event, not Quapaw.

(3) I have arranged the names here in such a way that the reader can easily see the correspondence of the Tunica words with the Spanish spellings. Haas (1940, 1950, 1953) does not discuss the name at all as far as I am able to determine, nor does she compound the two words as I have done here. The putative compound is found only in the de Soto accounts and in Swanton's discussion of them.

(4) [l] is a variant of the Proto-Siouan phoneme *r in several Dhegiha Siouan dialects, but it is not attested in Quapaw, where the reflex is uniformly [d] in modern times. The earlier recordings of the language also have [d] except for a few instances of lenis [t] recorded by Dorsey (c. 1895) in voiceless environments.

(5) This name is interpreted by Swanton (1985:229) as representing oka-lusa 'Black Water', an obviously Muskogean (most likely Chickasaw) name. This may be a legitimate interpretation. It may also have been a loan translation by de Soto's interpreters, who, at this point in the expedition, were most probably Chickasaw-speaking. Swanton (1979 [1946]:25) quotes Ranjel, pointing out that the Chickasaw chief specifically gave de Soto guides and interpreters to go to a place called Caluça, but he believes that the Caluça referred to was different from the identically-named province of Pacaha. If the Caluça associated with Pacaha was really Muskogean-speaking, then the chiefdom of which Pacaha was the seat of power was bilingual. Multilingual

chiefdoms seem to have been fairly common in the late prehistoric Southeast (v. Booker, et al. forthcoming).

(6) In spite of the evidence, Dorsey, in a Quapaw dictionary slip file in the National Anthropological Archives, includes the following under his entry for *Uka'-qpa-gti*. "Real Kwapas: the name of one of the five ancient Kwapa villages, known to the early French writers as Cappa, Capaha, Papikaha, etc." (Emphasis mine, RLR)

(7) This name looks as though it might be a reduplicated or partially reduplicated form of *Pacaha*. Haas (1940:45) reports that the Tunica language used reduplication to form the repetitive aspect of verbs. These she normally translates with 'to keep on' doing the action. Other Tunica languages might have used reduplication in other ways, but there is no way to know this. Unfortunately, I can find nothing in the literature on Tunica that would permit me to analyze this name.

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